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THE

TRUE GRECIAN BEND

A

STORY IN VERSE

BY

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"Whence and what art thou, execrable shape?"—MILTON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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THE

TRUE GRECIAN BEND.

A WOMAN in France got the spinal
disease,
And from that sad moment she had no
more ease;
To add to her anguish, she very soon
found,
Oh, horrors! her back was becoming quite
round.

The spasms of physical pain she endured,
Were keen, I assure you, and could not be cured;
But bad as these were, it seems, on the whole,
They could not compare with the pangs of her soul.

For I must inform you, O dear reader mine—
(I'm in my third verse, and indeed it is time)—
That our stylish Parisian was Fashion's dear slave,
And to its sweet service her brain and time gave.

If she had been poet or artist or sage,
Or one of "the women," so called, "of the age,"
With missions to Art, or the indigent poor,
Her crooked vertébra she might well endure.

For 'tis of no consequence, surely, I say,
If strong-minded women who flaunt in our day
Their rights to more freedom for work and for speech
Are placed by disease quite beyond the world's reach.

Such women belong to that low, common kind
Who assert that an active condition of mind
Or of hands (me! how vulgar!) does make, after all,
What we a true woman can worthily call.

But say, of what consequence, pray, can it be
If females with such vulgar notions, you see,
Are forced to stop work and all bold agitations
Of questions important to churches and nations

Because of a weakness of brain and of spine?
(Both organs, alas! being in a *decline.*)
It matters but little, if women like these,
Are deprived of all usefulness, comfort, and ease.

But when a fair daughter of Fashion—a treasure,
Who lives but to seek and to find her own pleasure,
A victim becomes to keen pains that do rack,
To pains that quite ruin the shape of her back—

Here, here is a tale that makes the heart bleed!
A tale wholly fit for a poet indeed!
Before I have finished, however, you'll find
That sunlight with shadow is herein combined.

At present the shadow rests over my maid,
While wrapped in reflection she sits in the shade.
Her brain being small, is quite like the pot
Which, owing to smallness, so soon became hot.

It seems at this moment, in truth, quite
on fire,
Harassed as it is with the spasms
of ire,
That seize it in thinking of hopes all
destroyed,
Her figure quite ruined! her future a
void!

For I must inform you, our "charmante Française,"
Deluded as all of us were in those
days,
Considered it really a feminine
charm,
To carry the figure—including the
arm—

According to Nature in some slight
degree,
With freedom and unstudied grace,
don't you see?
A form finely poised, and free in its
motion,
Is surely a sign—at least, such was the
notion—

Of youth and of health. Even some
thought that grace
Had a meaning and charm quite be-
yond a doll face.
But all such ideas have of course now
gone by
In times when the fashions do Nature
defy.

As I was just saying, our "charmante
Française,"
Deluded as all of us were in those
days,
Was tortured with agony now at the
thought
Of the change which the spinal affec-
tion had wrought

In her whose fine figure, a short time
ago,
Arrayed in rare furbelows, made such a
show
On the "Boulevards;" also when on
her white mare,
Erect and in "stove-pipe" she pranced
with the air

Which marks the great "parvenues" out as that class
Whose eyes, looking over you, say, "Let me pass!
Do you know who I am? I've a carriage and four,
A poodle and twenty-five servants and more."

But I am digressing. The subject is great,
And I fear I shall never get through at this rate.
To return to "mes moutons," I mean to my maid;
We left her, remember, in wrath and in shade.

She sat in the shade, for she feared
that the light
Would bring to her vision that horrible
sight,
A female with vertebral column
askew,
And now as she sat here she dreaded
the view.

But at the next moment a thought
bright as fire,
Seemed to burn in her eyes and to
chase away ire;
She rose, in a tremor of joy, from the
gloom,
And opening the shutters, made bright
the whole room.

She then all at once did proceed, with a rush,
To fasten a pillow, with cheeks all a-flush,
Just under her skirt, quite behind at the back,
And then she donned quickly a hat and a sack—

Seized quicker a parasol ; then without fear,
She faced the long mirror with eyes all a-cheer
With some inspiration, that strangely did lend
To a spine badly bent an additional bend.

Pray what was she doing? you ask, all amazed,
Perhaps you imagine the girl was quite crazed,
Or trying a cure—and that's madness enough—
With "similia similibus" ideas and such stuff.

Oh, no! my dear Reader; she's simply intent
On proving in practice the worth of a bent,
Which entered her mind a few moments ago,
And set all her brain and her heart in a glow.

In short, all creations of genius, you know,
Originate, so they say, always just so;
Quite all of a sudden, undreamt of, they're born
In the brain which seeks after to give them a form.

The form which our heroine sought now to give
To her noble creation was, sure as I live,
A crook in the back and a crook in the arm,
And with these same crooks she means yet to charm

Her circle of former admirers and friends,
And, after a ripe preparation, intends
To make her "*début*" in a style very new,
Unknown to the crowd or e'en the rare *few*.

Oh, view her, as now she continues to pass
Up and down, while she studies herself in the glass!
With parasol raised very high in the air,
And spine really taking a curve, I declare,

Exceeding by far the long crook that disease
Had wrought there in hours void of rest and of ease,
And yet, I assure you, her face glows with smiles,
While practicing poses the hours she beguiles.

But while I still watched her, a cloud thin as air,
Passed over the features that now seemed so fair;
With eyes on the mirror, I heard her exclaim,
"Oh! dear me! oh! dear me! I've lost it again."

She takes a new bend — then cries,
"That's not it!"
Here, dear reader mine, she was seized
with a fit
Of abdominal colic, which only did
serve
To add, you perceive, to her back a
new curve.

The full extra curve produced by the
pain,
Brought strangely the smiles to her
features again;
She cried, "Oh! kind Providence sure-
ly did send
This spasm to give me the 'true Gre-
cian bend!'

"The 'true Grecian bend!' here, here is a name
Which soon will acquire a most glorious fame!
It hides my poor hump altogether, you see,
And a leader of fashion again I will be!"

Since the colic referred to, by Providence sent,
Two weeks had gone by, and our damsel had bent
Whatever of strength she possessed to attain
The "true Grecian bend," and it was not in vain.

The day now arrived for the startling
"début,"
And our heroine smiling emerged to
the view
Of the Boulevards, where "tout le
monde" in a maze
At the strange apparatus in wonder did
gaze.

This strange apparatus, as I before
said,
Perched on heels that supported a
hump on the head,
A hump on the back and a crook in
the arm
Presented a vision entitled to
charm

The eyes of all artists; for sure 't is their duty
To recognize always the true curve of beauty;
And who can deny that here was a curve
Sufficiently curving as model to serve?

The world, as I said, at first in a maze,
With sneers at the strange apparatus did gaze;
But when this same world at last did discover
The "strange apparatus" was she, and no other,

Who only last year the gay fashion did
lead,
And lived on the Boulevard Malesherbes
indeed!
They suddenly found that her present
strange style
Was but a new fashion she'd set all the
while.

Upon the discovery that, without
doubt,
The humps and the crooks were "*the*
latest out;"
With common accord the dear feminine
gender,
At once set to work in trying to
render

Themselves in appearance as near as could be,
To her who was now all the fashion, you see.
So where only yesterday out on the street
But one crooked female you might chance to meet,

To-day there existed a hundred at least,
Who made up a pantomime, truly a feast
Of color and form, to him who delights
In fine graceful contours and that sort of sights;

And yet it is proper that I should confess
(For to know "what is what" I did never profess),
The sight of curved females at first raised a question
Which seemed to me worthy some solid reflection.

The question was this: if 'tis true as averred,
Human origin may to the ape be referred,
Then we are now turning, I boldly declare,
To monkeys again. Pray look at the air

Of that monkey the organ-man carries about.
Gaze but a short moment and you will find out
When standing, his back just describes the outline
Of that fashionable female, in garments so fine.

Does not this resemblance, oh, tell me, I pray,
'Twixt apes and the fashionable dames of to-day,
Suggest to your mind the identical question,
Which seemed to me worthy some solid reflection?

CASIN DES MODES
PELI

I say, that it *seemed*, for I must explain,
On seeing the bend, I could not refrain
At first from scorn and dejection, but now
My feelings are altered entirely, I vow.

For when by the dashing "beau monde" I was told,
The bend was the *fashion* — I soon came to hold
Opinions quite different; believe me, to-day
It seems to me "stylish" and most distingué."

And now I must tell you, last week at
a dance,
I found out the origin, quite by mere
chance,
Of the "bend" surnamed "Grecian,"
and then, think says I,
The fair sex shall know this; at once
I will try

To tell them in some way. So, spite
of delays,
I've written the story of the "char-
mante Française,"
And while I congratulate all my fair
friends
Who now are expert in the various
"bends,"

A word I would add—it is this: forget not
How specially favored and blest is your lot.
For you can have humps, if you like, on the back,
Without the bad colic and pains that did rack

The female whose spine the best doctors couldn't mend,
But oh! she invented "the true Grecian bend!"
A "bend" born of suffering truly pathetic,
A "bend" scientific as well as æsthetic.

Now all of you know, I make bold to infer,
The "colic" and "pains" did in Paris occur.
Of course we Americans would not receive
Any fashions but those of imported disease:

Excuse me: I mean that the "modes" are imported,
For it is very true, as has oft been reported,
We worship all things of Parisian extraction;
Why, even its morals (?) have quite an attraction!

Of course, we despise them, but then,
do n't you see,
They come after all from the stylish
" Paris ? "
Oh ! wondrous Bill Shakspeare, of very
huge fame !
You lied, Sir, in saying all names were
the same.

But now before closing, I gladly ex-
tend
To all who desire to attain the true
bend,
A single suggestion, pray do n't pass
it by,
But listen, then, labor " and never say
die ! "

In every Art-study you'll find it is best,
To model from Nature with uniform zest.
Oh, come now with me! I'll show you to-night,
The model I spoke of — a pitiful sight.

We'll leave the gay avenue — this is the way—
Through byways and lanes where the clear light of day
Has no room to enter. Here godless despair
Finds vent in wild curses and cries—do you dare

To utter reproaches? Come, come, do
not shrink;
You find the air stifling? Why, now
only think,
You're here but a moment and quite
lose your breath;
Yet many will dwell here from birth
unto death.

You cannot return, though chilling the
gloom,
For in this dark building we'll find a
dark room;
This stairway leads to it—come, let us
ascend;
I'll show you the model I spoke of, my
friend.

'Tis long after midnight;—we reach very soon,
Up by the dark stairway, the room through the gloom;
And here in the corner, where burns a pale light,
Sits sewing and shivering a woman to-night.

Through many a season, drooped low o'er her knee,
Shè's sat there, and often she scarcely could see
What stitches to take, so flickering her lamp!
So weary her eyes! so chilling the damp!

Two little ones sleep at her side on the
floor;
At times she looks towards them with
heart very sore
At the thought of their cries at the last
scanty meal,
At the thought that on waking how
hungry they'll feel.

"Oh! what shall I give them? the
crusts are quite dry,
Yet they're all that I have." With
many a sigh
She turns to her work, for she knows
when 't is done
More bread can be bought with the
shilling she's won.

O brave, weary mother! the morning
has come;
You're hungry and cold, but the work
is not done.
Thus through the sad seasons she's bent
o'er her knee
So low that her back has a curve, don't
you see—

A curve truly Grecian! I'm sure you
would find,
Should you dress her in fashionable
clothes of the kind
Worn now, she'd look "stylish" and
have quite an "air."
Her "bend" is more perfect by far, I
declare,

Than that of our ladies so fine and so gay
Who walk in the avenues day after day;
And surely an outline by Nature designed,
Is much the best model, if you are inclined,

Fair lady, to triumph and truly intend
To study as artist the "true Grecian bend."
A model from Nature! now, here is the question,
Is *this* Grecian bend really worth your inspection?

There's only one drawback to this same
inspection,
The thought of which fills me with
some slight dejection,
I fear if this study you still will pur-
sue,
It may not be best, friend, for me and
for you.

For listen! There's possibly danger, you
know,
That you may become, in these
"models" who sew,
So much interested that you may
forget
Yourself and the fashions, and that
we'd regret.

Fair lady, oh! guard against this above all,
For what sadder lot could e'er you befall?
And what would become of the "beau-monde" to-day,
Without "upper tens" and the fashions so gay?

It's time I should close; my task's at an end;
I've told you the tale of the "true Grecian bend."
Besides, a good model I've now pointed out,
By which you'll attain to perfection, no doubt.

And now pray permit me, while saying adieu,
With warmth once again to congratulate you,
That Providence kindly a colic did send,
Which gave you, dear ladies, the "true Grecian bend!"

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